

## **Second Chances** by **EmpressoTears**

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**Summary:**

The universe really should have warned him that a meddling eight year old would have the power to change his life.

Years after the incident with the Upside Down, Will's a successful comic book writer, and he's fortunate enough to meet a little girl on the New York subway who's a huge fan of his stories.

But how was he supposed to know that she was the daughter of his childhood crush?

## Second Chances

### Author's Note:

For the purposes of this story, the party drifted apart in college and lost touch. Personally, I think they've been through way too much together to ever let this happen, but I had the idea of them running into each other years in the future and I couldn't think of any other way to let that happen.

Also, I know next to nothing about comic books, so if I used the wrong terminology, I deeply apologize.

Will was sitting on the subway, paging through a comic book. And yeah, he was still a nerd who read comic books in his free time even in his thirties, but this was different. This one was his comic book.

Right out of college, Will was lucky enough to find a publisher that was interested in his work. His comics became retellings of their childhood adventures; the monsters were watered down and the heroics were amplified, but it was still them. And he always had a zoomer in the party, though he would just laugh it off and never explain when his publicist pressed him as to why.

And one published comic turned into two, then a whole series fell into place and Will was pleased to say his comics were rather popular. Popular enough to support him so he could focus on drawing all day and not worry about getting another job. Popular enough for him to buy his mom a new car and give her extravagant gifts every so often just because he could.

Will was living in New York, now, far away from Hawkins, Indiana and riding the subway while reading one of his own comics. All in all, he felt rather proud of himself.

“Is that a Mind Flayer comic?” a little voice squeaked from next to him. Surprised, Will looked up and saw a little girl, maybe seven or eight, with huge brown eyes that reminded him achingly of a young Mike Wheeler.

“I...” he stuttered, caught off guard. “Yeah, it is.”

“I thought so,” the little girl said and plopped down next to Will with a flourish. “I’ve read them all. I know everything about them, I’m like an expert! I’m drawing my own comic right now to figure out what happens because it’s taking *foreeeeeeeeeever*,” she really drew that word out, “for the next issue to come out.”

“And what do you think is going to happen?” he asked her with a smile.

She regarded him with her large eyes. “Do you actually care? Or are you just doing that adult thing where you pretend to listen to what I’m saying but actually want to talk about something else?”

Oh, he was liking this spunky girl.

“I really do care about what you think!” he assured her.

“Okay then!” All of a sudden her poutiness disappeared and her chipper giggling was back. “I think the Mind Flayer is gonna escape the Upside Down and attack the town and the party is going to have to use all their powers to push it back in and...”

She kept chattering and Will listened intently with a smile. He used to be just like her, spending every minute of his life thinking about comics and campaigns. He wondered idly what his friends were up to. After high school they all went to different colleges, then they got jobs and moved even further away from home. They used to call each other for holidays and birthdays, but life got busy and they slowly just fell out of touch. But Will still thought about them. Every time he sat at a table and signed comic books for hours on end, he saw his party in the faces of the kids that lined up in front of him.

Will glanced around the compartment of the subway, looking for the little girl’s parents. Was she all alone in the big city? Who trusted a child to be safe around here?

“Hey mister, did you lie to me?” that little voice hissed in Will’s ear and a small hand tugged insistently on the sleeve of his coat.

“Hmm?” Will was desperately wracking his brain, trying to think of

when he lied to the little girl. He did get a little distracted after he assured her he cared about what she was saying, but he was usually so good about hiding that.

“You said this was a Mind Flayer comic,” her eyes were narrowed.

“And it is,” Will answered, confused. It really was.

“No it’s not,” she all but shouted back. “The party never goes into tunnels, and they would never ever let themselves be separated,” she pointed insistently at the open page on Will’s lap. “I’ve read every issue and I know that’s not real. It’s not part of the story.”

Will just chuckled. Then he bent his head towards her and whispered conspiratorially, “Can I let you in on a secret?”

Her nose was still wrinkled dubiously, but the little girl nodded slowly.

“This is the newest issue.”

“No way,” she pouted. “That doesn’t come out for another month.”

“I’ve got another secret,” Will whispered.

“Okaaaaaaaaaay,” she droned back.

“My name is Will Byers.”

Her eyes blinked owlishly one, twice, and her mouth opened and closed like a fish. Will smiled softly and watched the gears turn in her head.

“You... You’re... You... You made all these?” There was reverence in her little voice. “You drew all these comics? Oh my god, you’re my favorite author ever!” She squealed and threw her arms around him and Will could only smile. Then he glanced up and realized he was almost at his stop.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, but I have to get off soon,” Will told her. He truly did feel sorry for cutting the conversation short. He hated the disappointment that clouded her eyes.

“I have so many things I need to ask you about!” Jane cried, clutching his arm as if that would stop him from leaving her side.

“You know,” Will said, only slightly ignoring her statement as he rummaged around in his bag until he found a pen, “I don’t think I caught your name.”

“Jane,” she said, her eyes glued to Will’s hand that flipped his copy of the newest Mind Flayer issue to the front and uncapped his pen. “My name is Jane.”

“Alright then, Jane,” Will smiled and signed his loopy signature on the front cover, and handed it over to her.

Her eyes went wide as she traced her finger over his name and the words he put below it. *Stay curious, Jane. And never give up on your dreams.*

“I guess this is goodbye, then,” Will said as he zipped up his coat and shouldered his bag. Enjoy it, Jane.”

Jane tackled him in a hug and squealed, “Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you,” over and over until Will pried himself free of her grip and got off the subway. He walked two blocks to his apartment and unlocked the door to his quiet home, his smile never once leaving his face.

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“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,” Jane screamed as she hurled the apartment door open and pushed her way inside, “You’ll never believe what happened today!”

Mike Wheeler looked up from his boring adult person book to acknowledge his daughter as she burst into the previously quiet room. “Hello to you, too, young lady. What’s got you so riled up?” he asked, bemused as she flung herself onto the couch next to him. Usually she would curl up into his side and they would spend their Friday nights watching movies together but today she was bouncing up and down and clutching a comic book to her heart more reverently than most would treat a Bible.

“Oh, Daddy, I was on the subway today coming over from Mommy’s and there was this man reading a Mind Flayer comic so I went over to talk to him and he--”

“Stop right there,” Mike interrupted, his eyebrows furrowed. He put his hand on her arm in a vain attempt to stop her from jumping around so much. “You were talking to a stranger on the subway?”

“He had kind eyes,” she just brushed off her father’s concerns. “And yeah, maybe it was a bad idea, but he was so tiny I could have beat him in a fight.”

“How old was he?” Mike probed.

“I mean he was probably your age, but that’s not the point!” Jane returned to her bouncing.

“And what’s the point here?”

“He was Will Byers, Daddy! He’s my favorite author,” Jane continued chattering about the comic he signed for her and how cool her was, but Mike could barely hear her.

He felt like he was drifting underwater. His senses were addled and his mind was useless.

Will Byers.

Mike had almost given up hope of ever running into that boy again.

“Can I see that book?” Mike asked his daughter softly, and she begrudgingly shared her treasure with him. Mike’s fingers traced over the soft loops and whorls of Will’s name. He opened up the book and his heart ached at the familiarity of the drawings. He would recognize Will’s style anywhere.

“Daddy, why are you crying?” Jane asked softly.

“I didn’t know that I was,” he sniffled in response and quickly brushed his tears away. “Do you think I could borrow the first issues of this series?” Mike asked his daughter softly.

“Ummm, only if you tell me why you’re being so weird,” Jane responded.

“I... I grew up with Will Byers,” Mike said, his brain frantically trying to find the right words to describe their relationship and coming up empty. “We used to be friends. Really good friends.”

“Really?” Jane’s wide eyes were all Mike needed to send the story tumbling out of his mouth. He told her all about their party and their D&D nights. He watered down Will’s disappearance and everything about the Upside Down, telling her he was just lost in the woods for a week. And he ended with college and losing touch of his friends. He told her how he met a girl and fell in love and had a kid, but things just didn’t work out and they separated.

“But you are Mommy don’t hate each other,” Jane interjected.

“No, we don’t,” Mike laughed. “I’m really glad we can still be friends. It makes things easier for you, sweetie.”

They sat in silence for a little bit while Jane started paging through her new comic book and Mike watched over her shoulder. Then suddenly she stopped.

“Daddy, can I ask you something?”

“Jane, you know you can,” he told her.

“Were you in love with Will Byers?”

Mike all but choked on his tongue at that. He tried to pass it off as a coughing fit, but he had one hell of an observant daughter and she probably wasn’t fooled. Once he caught his breath, he said, “Why do ask, sweetheart?”

Jane just shrugged. “The way you talk about him. It’s like you care about him.”

“Well, he was my friend for years.”

“Yeah but you also started crying when you saw his name,” Jane pointed out. Then with wisdom beyond her years she told him, “The

only people that cry are idiots that fall in love. Besides, Mommy was telling her friends that you want to kiss guys just like you kiss girls so it's not impossible.”

Mike was shocked. “Well yeah, Jane, that’s right, I’m-I’m bisexual. That means I can fall in anyone no matter what gender they are.”

“So answer the question, Daddy,” Jane pushed. “Were you in love with Will Byers?”

Mike took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“I honestly don’t know, kiddo,” he finally said.

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“Daddy, Daddy, there he is!” Will was quietly sketching out an idea for his comic when he heard the shrill voice of a young girl. Usually that’s the kind of thing he would ignore on a New York subway, but for some reason this one caught his attention. He glanced up and smiled broadly when he saw Jane rushing toward him, dragging someone along with her. Will presumed it was her father, but before he could take a moment to check out the owner of a hideously stereotypical Dad Sweater, Jane was tackling him in a hug.

“Hey, Jane,” Will said when she finally let go of him. “Did you finish the comic yet?”

She plopped down in the empty seat beside him and started jabbering on about how much she loved it and what she thought was going to happen next. Still listening, Will glanced up at her father to introduce himself. And boy, it was a good thing Will was sitting down because he would have fallen over if he had been standing.

Right in front of him was Michael fucking Wheeler.

Sure, his hair had been trimmed shorter than it had been when they were younger and there were a few gray hairs near his temples, but oh, Will knew those eyes. They crinkled softly as Mike smiled at him and Will forgot how to breathe for a few seconds.

“Mind if I sit down?” Mike asked softly, gesturing to the seat on Will’s other side.

“I... yeah, absolutely, go ahead,” Will stuttered softly. His head was spinning. “I’m guessing Jane is your daughter then.”

Mike smiled fondly at her and said, “Yeah, she’s my little spawn.”

“Named after her mother?” That was a loaded question, but Mike just laughed the tension away.

“Not in the way you’re thinking. El and I went our separate ways sometime during college. I’m not sure I really paid attention to when. But then years later Jane’s mom suggested the name and I just went along with it.” He giggled then, and Will’s heart melted a little bit. “I guess I have a soft spot.”

“Yeah but Mommy’s not with Daddy anymore,” Jane burst into the conversation helpfully. “And Daddy likes kissing boys so you can--”

“Alright, yeah, that’s enough, Jane,” Mike cut her off, blushing furiously. Will just raised his eyebrows at him. Mike desperately tried to change the subject. “I hear you’re writing comic books now,” he said, gesturing to the sketchbook propped open on Will’s lap.

Will just looked down bashfully and responded, “Well, yeah. It started as just something I did for fun, but then I got something published, and the story got a life of its own, and it’s been taking me to some interesting places. I don’t suppose you’ve read them,” he looked at Mike owlishly. Jane giggled and watched them talk.

“I... may have read a few...” Mike admitted.

Then his daughter piped up, “He asked me if he could borrow them the last time I saw you. He read them all on one night. He didn’t sleep at all!”

“Oh really?” Will turned to Mike with a smile. “And what were your thoughts?”

“They were really good, Will. Amazingly good. I was always telling you you’d go places.” Will blushed and smiled at his lap happily. Mike took a deep breath and continued, “And uh... if you’re not busy tonight, do you want to come over for dinner? I mean, we just have so much to talk about and I want to hear what you’ve been getting up

to and I know Jane would love it if you--"

"Are you asking me on a date, Michael Wheeler?" Will interrupted, gently poking Mike's side. It had been years since they had seen each other, but within a few minutes they were back to the achingly familiar friendship of their youth.

"I think I might just be, William Byers," Mike said with a blush that spread all the way up to the tips of his ears. Jane giggled uncontrollably.

It looked like two boys from Hawkins, Indiana were getting a second chance at love.

**Author's Note:**

Realistically, there should be a lot more homophobia in this story.

But this is fiction. And in fiction I have the power to make a kinder world.